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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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A Notsie narrative perspective on turnover in the UK financial services industry

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a cultural perspective from the Global South, *Notsie* narrative, a West African literary folklore, we explore the high churn rate in the UK financial services industry. Viewing the storied accounts of former financial complaint handlers through a Notsie narrative lens, we examine why they frequently quit their well-paid jobs. Our study elucidates how the relentless pursuit of efficiency culminates in *managerial tyranny* – a set of impulsive and oppressive organizing practices that combine to precipitate high turnover. The wisdom of our Notsie narrative perspective centres on the importance of relationality – the skilled ways of interrelating that create connections between people, and what it means for the Notsie kingdom being doomed to collapse without its people; a wisdom seemingly overlooked and undervalued in western ways of knowing, located in individualism, rationality, and instrumentalism.

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Introduction

Turnover, combined levels of employee exit that occur within groups, work units and firms, is commonplace and a particular feature of retail, hospitality, and financial service firms. In the UK, it has attained a rate of approximately 15% per year, with most organizations experiencing a rise (ONS, 2019). As a trend, it is costly for employers, with attendant consequences for productivity, performance, and competitiveness (De Meulenaere et al., 2021; Nyberg & Ployhart, 2013). It is therefore unsurprising that managing and assuming the costs associated with turnover have attracted growing scholarly interest (Bermiss & McDonald, 2018; Hom et al., 2017; Speer et al., 2019). However, the role that managerial practices play in precipitating turnover has received surprisingly little research attention.

To the extent that prior research speaks to this issue, it focuses primarily on labor market conditions and industry comparisons of turnover rates in elucidating the

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(in)voluntary and social context within which employees leave their organizations (Croucher et al., 2012). At the meso level, some studies adopt a process approach to theorizing the various stages employees go through when deciding to quit (Hancock et al., 2017; Porter & Rigby, 2021). Others, adopting content models, have concentrated on the causes and antecedents to employees quitting their jobs (Huselid, 1995; Moon, 2017; Walumbwa et al., 2019). Extant research also emphasizes employees' job attitudes and job characteristics as fundamental precursors of increased turnover (Jolly et al., 2021; Porter & Rigby, 2021). Among these are low job autonomy, poor supervisor support, limited job mobility, inadequate training, unsatisfying work, and high stress (see Hancock et al., 2017; Heavey et al., 2013; Rubenstein et al., 2018). Together, these bodies of research suggest that relational practice, "the skilled ways of interrelating that create connections between people" (Dutton & Dukerich, 2006, p. 21) in the workplace, could tip the balance between people staying or leaving. Thus, relational practice is not just about skilled work; it encapsulates the heterogeneous configuration of organizing relations and practices that shape organizational outcomes such as turnover. Yet they stop short of exploring the recursive relationship between effective organizing practice-relations and turnover and addressing under what conditions, and to what extent, relational practices could induce turnover in organizing.

Our study takes a step toward addressing these lacunae in prior research in turnover by articulating a practice-relational rooted explanation that accounts for why people choose to leave organizations in droves (Chow et al., 2012; Sarpong & Maclean, 2021). In doing so, we draw in novel fashion on ideas from *Notsie* narrative, a West African literary folklore that emphasizes position-practice relations, to theorize and advance a nuanced understanding of the underlying characteristics of employee departures from financial-sector firms due to shared social processes and decisions. The Notsie narrative perspective which provides a framework for the dialectical analysis of thought and action, we argue, has the potential to expand our understanding of the practice-relational context within which high turnover occurs. Empirically, we draw on interviews with Financial Complaint Handlers (FCH), employees on the frontline of managing Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) reportable complaints in the UK, who have recently quit their jobs. We found that the inflexible pursuit of efficiency and productivity in the high-pressure work environments which obtain in financial services (Behravesh et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2018) triggers the adoption of *managerial tyranny*. Managerial tyranny denotes a set of impulsive and oppressive managerial relational organizing practices that operate together or serially to pit managers against employees.

Our paper and the empirical study it explores make two principal contributions. First, while prior research emphasizes what Hausknecht and Trevor (2011, p. 354) refer to as "emergent contextual considerations" and antecedents of turnover, we draw on a perspective from the Global South, West African literary folklore in the form of Notsie narrative, to develop in-depth, nuanced understanding of how high turnover may play out in practice. Thus, we unravel a set of managerial practices – including what we call a providence gaze, relentless evaluation, infantilization at work, and marginalization-in-practice – and explore how these play out to precipitate turnover. Crucially, the Notsie narrative perspective we advance makes no attempt to supplant or invalidate existing perspectives on turnover. Rather, it complements them by seeking cumulatively to enrich understanding of turnover in the "high performance" workplaces that characterize the financial sector, potentially allowing for a more complete understanding and reconceptualization of turnover. Second, in accentuating the historical contextualization of a current phenomenon which, over time, has been shaped by an intersecting neo-liberal socio-political and economic agenda, we offer suggestions as to why turnover is especially prominent in such environments.

Notsie Narratives: The Seventeenth Century Exodus from Notsie City Kingdom

The new turn to oral narratives, referred to as *xotutu* in contemporary West African literature, that recounts the movement of the Ewe people from the city kingdom of Notsie has come to be known as Notsie narratives (Dorvlo, 2013; Wyllie, 1977). The disparate and complex nature of Notsie narratives means there are varying accounts of the origin and movement of the Ewe people from their original ancestral home to their present land in Ghana (Akinjogbin, 1967; Enkatachalam, 2012). The account of Manoukian (1952) suggests the gradual westward expansion of the Yoruba tribe in the late sixteenth century triggered their movement and settlement in a town called Notsie situated in the present-day Republic of Togo (Kodzo-Vordoagu, 1994). The former kings of Notsie ruled well and the town flourished to become a kingdom and a regional economic powerhouse. The prosperity of the city was recorded in 1669 by the French traveler, Elbee:

> "The king of this land is powerful and runs it well; his grand politics are devoted to conflict resolution and fairness." (Dotse, 2011, p. 6)

In 1812, the British traveler, G. A. Robertson, similarly observed that "the town of Oache [i.e., Notsie] is a privileged place" (Greene, 2002, p. 1020). Following the death of his father in the mid-seventeenth century, Ago Akoli (Agorkorli) was crowned King of Notsie. The new sovereign quickly disbanded his royal court and went on to kill the wisecracking coterie that comprised the King's Council (with exception of Counsel Tegli, who was hidden by his kinsmen), who opposed his signature policy of conquering neighboring lands (Dotse, 2011). Having fended off the courtiers' threat to his vision, King Agorkoli had no intention of agreeing to anything that could see him lose power. The key to his regime survival was his strategy of using the state for patronage, and his new courtiers and security chiefs backed him in exchange for such.

King Agorkorli ruled with an iron fist and decreed a state ethic of tyranny by mixing impunity, intolerance, chauvinism, and violence to silence his subjects. This enabled him to impose his will on the people, and whoever resisted him was punished. Next, he subjugated the people and insisted on a regime of absolutism (Amenumey, 1986; Quarcoopome, 1993). For his cruel pleasure and flawed vision of building the "greatest" city state, he frequently set impossible tasks for his subjects and made them execute hazardous and laborious tasks for misdemeanors (Dotse, 2011). Sensing that some were plotting their escape from the kingdom, the King appointed "spies" to monitor the movements of recalcitrant potential escapees. When several fled his clutches, he ordered a tall thick wall to be built around the kingdom. Trapped within the confines of the kingdom, the King persecuted his people mercilessly, committed atrocities against them, and deprived them of basic freedom and justice (Anyidoho, 2003; Kodzo-Vordoagu, 1994).

Bewildered, indignant and despairing, the people determined to leave the kingdom. They sought the counsel of Tegli, who gave one elderly man a sword and instructed the people to throw all the wastewater they generated in their households against a marked side of the thick wall around the kingdom. The man was asked to tap the wet part of the wall three times with a sword after a month at dawn. After this, the young men gave a mighty push, and the wet part of the wall crumbled before them. The people escaped through the hole in the wall. The last ones to escape the tyrannical rule of King Agorkoli, according to Hornberger (1877):

> "Kept their [old] homeland in sight … by walking backwards. The king heard about the mass emigration and promptly sent out his [army] in all directions. But the footprints of those who were fleeing pointed in the direction of the homeland which astonished and confused those who were searching". (Hornberger, 1877; cited in Greene, 2002, p. 1024)

While space precludes an exhaustive, detailed account of the great escape and exodus, the flight of the Ewe people from the kingdom of Notsie prompted the collapse of the once prosperous kingdom. The name "Agorkoli" has since become synonymous with the singular acts of violence and oppression which were the *raison d'être* for his rule (Draper, 2008). The misery encountered during his reign instilled in the collective memory of the Ewe people the need to resist and escape any form of oppressed rule in their everyday lives. To date, the descendants of the Notsie people in present-day Ghana celebrate the annual *Hogbetsotso* festival to mark the last day of the exodus of their forbears from Notsie (Anyidoho, 2003). Their popular, distinctive signature dance, *Agbaza*, in which the arms move back and forth while stepping backwards to signal how they escaped Agorkoli's tyrannical rule, has come to represent one of the contemporary traditional dances in West Africa (Green, 1996; Locke, 2012). Table 1 is a summary of Agorkoli's ethics of tyranny and their corresponding signature practices and tactics reported to have cumulatively precipitated the exodus of his people from the once prosperous kingdom.

A talented demagogue, King Agorkoli by all historical accounts had a malignant narcissistic personality and is said to have subjected Notsie to a reign of pious tyranny (Fiawoo, 1958; Wiegrabe, 1938). Critical opprobrium generated by his ethics and practices that brought misery to Notsie, over a generation, have been used to create macabre oral

Table 1. Summary of King Agorkoli's tyrannical ethics and signature practices.

	Tyrannical ethic	Signature practices and tactics
1	Inequalities and rights violation	■ High-handedness ■ Callous transgressions ■ Dehumanization of subjects ■ Patronization and prevarication
2	Deception and impunity	■ Uncanny intelligence gathering and surveillance ■ Building of the infamous Notsie city walls ■ Ruthlessness and summary executions ■ Detention and imprisonment without trial
3	Silence and outrage	■ Persecution of dissidents ■ Violence and torture ■ Subjugating polyphonic voices ■ Censorship and disdain for glasnost
4	Misery and hardship	■ Stigmatization of intelligentsia ■ Poor working conditions ■ Investment in vanity projects ■ State for patronage

history lessons on the consequences of tyrannical rule on freedom and justice, resistance, and collapse (Greene, 2003; Mitchell, 1998). In the next section, we review studies on turnover after which we delineate how the collective memories and meanings associated with this literary genre might inform understanding of turnover in contemporary financial services.

Conceptual Background: Turnover in Organizing

Turnover, the combined levels of employees (in)voluntarily leaving one organization to join others remains an enduring challenge to successful organizing (De Meulenaere et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2017). Integrating ideas from a plethora of disciplines, ranging from cultural studies and psychology to strategy and human resources, existing studies have sought to elucidate how turnover results in organizational human capital depletion (Dlugos & Keller, 2020; Hausknecht & Holwerda, 2013; Tanova & Holtom, 2008). Over time, two theoretical perspectives pertaining to "process" and "content" have emerged as dominant (Maertz Jr & Campion, 2004; Nyberg & Ployhart, 2013). The process approach charts the sequence of behavioral decisions people take prior to leaving their positions. Past studies in this category have shown how employees may become disenchanted or dissatisfied with their jobs, how they may start to act (or act up) in their roles, when they make their stay/go decisions, how they evaluate the labor market and search for new jobs, and finally how they quit (Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Steel & Lounsbury, 2009). A new process turn has focused in parallel on employee decision paths, escalating interaction processes, and how these may culminate in diminished organizational performance and hence rising turnover (Bartunek et al., 2008; Hom et al., 2019; Ton & Huckman, 2008).

Despite unavoidable overlaps, the "content" perspective on turnover, at one end of the spectrum, tends to focus on why people quit their jobs. Studies in this domain have sought to unravel the contingent links between individual attributes and organizational characteristics that may lead employees to quit (Hom et al., 2017; Vardaman et al., 2008). Thus, the way people feel about and perceive their jobs or value their work may serve as predictors in gauging their propensity to quit (Balz & Schuller, 2018; Chen et al., 2012). Evaluated under the rubrics of job satisfaction, whose principal components may comprise general working conditions (Azeez et al., 2016), monetary benefits (Li-Ping Tang et al., 2000), attitudes towards the work group or organization, or management (Liu et al., 2012), the attribute-characteristics literature suggests that turnover intentions increase as job satisfaction declines (Judge et al., 2001; Stamolampros et al., 2019). Against this background, recent theory has repeatedly emphasized job embeddedness as a further predictor of employee propensity to stay across a variety of contexts (Jiang et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2014). Conceptualized as the investment that employees make in their respective roles, job embeddedness as a theoretical construct comprises links, fit, and sacrifice (Holtom and Inderrienden, 2006; Symitsi et al., 2018). *Links* denote the connections that employees make to others in the organization and to their family and friends in the communities they inhabit, which keep them from leaving. *Fit* consists of employees' perceived compatibility with their work organizations and the communities in which they reside; while *sacrifice* refers to the perceived psychological, social, or mental costs associated with leaving. In sum, the turnover viewpoint suggests that job embeddedness lessens the appeal of movement. Put simply, the higher the degree of embeddedness, the lower the attraction of leaving (Burrows et al., 2022; Felps et al., 2009).

Studies on turnover have also focused on dominant stakeholder views of an organization's reputation as a function of its employees' turnover intentions, a pervasive antecedent to quitting (Ashforth et al., 2020; Deniz, 2020; Piszczek, 2020). Put differently, employees working for organizations with a poor reputation tend to report high turnover intentions. Through the reflective gaze of social identity and categorization theories, this stream of research argues that real or imagined organizational values and ethos (De Roeck et al., 2016), perceived friendliness, benevolence, or aggressiveness (Ehrhart & Kuenzi, 2017), or the extent to which people feel that their organization cares about their well-being (Fazio et al., 2017), influence reported affective commitment and hence turnover intentions. Thus, employees identifying with their organizations are likely to integrate into the organization as an inherent part of their self-concept, and become psychologically enmeshed with it, such that they are more committed and willing to continue membership (Jo & Ellingson, 2019; Sun et al., 2019; Vardaman et al., 2018).

Recently, a major advance within the turnover literature has redirected attention to theorizing how formal organizing configurations and performance – the way work is organized, reporting relations, and organizational level performance goals – may precipitate turnover (Agarwal & Gupta, 2018; Joseph et al., 2016; Stritch et al., 2020). This emerging stream of literature suggests that organizing practices and structures (including, *inter alia*, procedures, disciplinary mechanisms, and spatial layouts), that reinforce differential power asymmetries in the workplace and threaten individuals' capacity to exercise agency at work, can also precipitate turnover (Houshmand et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2018). Sarpong et al. (2018) argue that people are likely to quit their jobs or stay to engage in "creative deviance" (Mainemelis, 2010), when they experience structural strain in the form of inflexible organizing procedures and architectures that threaten their autonomy and creativity at work. Elsewhere, scholars have found that turnover intentions tend to be pronounced among employees who believe their organizations are employing overt or covert tactics to control their everyday lives (Brougham & Haar, 2018; Kim et al., 2019).

Together, representing an interesting mix of competing ideas, these broad antecedents or predictors have helped to frame research on turnover. However, this burgeoning literature is deeply rooted in western "ways of knowing" distinguished by its emphasis on "rationality, free thinking, and search for truth for its own sake" (Tola & Dragonetti, 2005, p. 63). Considering turnover through a "western gaze" (Maclean et al., 2017) may limit our potential to explain some of the observed regularities of turnover as an outcome of a "patterned consistency of actions emerging from [relational processes of] interactions rather than on the micro-activities of individual agents" (Chia & MacKay, 2007, p. 24), particularly in industries that pride themselves on attracting and retaining talent. We argue that the power of indigenous way of knowing, particularly the significance of storytelling in African culture as a way of knowing and disseminating important values and principles has the potential to enrich and deepen our understanding of turnover. From this perspective, we draw on ideas from the Global South, from a West African literary folklore known as Notsie narrative, to elucidate turnover in organizing. Providing insight into how King Agorkoli's tyrannical rule triggered the escape of the Ewe people from Notsie in the latter part of the sixteenth century, our lens offers a new way of framing the incidence of turnover that casts fresh light on how "position-practice relations" can extend understanding of this contemporary phenomenon (Aristidou & Barrett, 2018). Two advantages, we suggest, emerge from adopting this frame. First, integrating notions from an African literary folklore with inherent insights as to why people quit their jobs offers an alternative interpretive lens through which to ponder turnover in a way that transcends western "ways of knowing", centered on rationalism and instrumentalism (Nkomo, 2017). Second, related to this, it serves as a starting point to deepen the debate on the potential contribution that other "ways of knowing" emanating from the Global South might make to expand understanding as to why employees quit their jobs in such numbers. In this way, it highlights the contribution that African "ways of knowing", which remain largely unutilized in management research can be used to reconceptualize organizational lived experiences and expand boundaries of extant theorizing in management (Amaeshi & Idemudia, 2015; Mangaliso, 2001).

A Notsie Narrative Approach to Turnover

Like other literary folklores steeped in cultural myths and often passed down verbally in the oral tradition from generation to generation (Jones, 1991), the value and explanatory power of Notsie narrative in relation to other forms of knowledge emanating from Africa, such as Ubuntu (Mangaliso, 2001), is that it may "retrospectively project a narrative order on events" (Meretoja, 2014, p. 90), and provide context for interpreting present lived experiences in relation to the past and the future. The tyrannical monarchy and imprisoning walls of the ancient kingdom are emblematic of how misrule can precipitate the exit of talented people and, in turn, the downfall and collapse of otherwise successful organizations. Temporally connecting the rise and fall of the kingdom with present lived experiences, Notsie narrative provides a novel context in which to challenge and expand understanding of turnover in contemporary organizing. Thus, in pondering turnover anew through the prism of Notsie narratives, the *modus operandi* of King Agorkoli that precipitated the collapse of his empire resonates with impulsive, oppressive managerial relational organizing practices that may cumulatively influence employees' decisions to leave their organization. The parallels between the unfolding of the Notsie exodus and turnover in general, is instructive in helping to reconceptualize and extend our understanding of turnover in practice.

First, the success and prosperity of the Notsie can be traced back to earlier kings who treated people just and fairly. This highlights the argument that when there is evident supervisory support, employees tend to identify more with their organization, they are more inclined to give of their best and the firm is more likely to flourish, which in turn reduces employee turnover intentions (Speer et al., 2019; Tuzun & Kalemci, 2012). Agorkoli's desire to conquer neighboring lands by "fair means or foul" encapsulates two related features of modern managerial approaches to organizing: excessive, aggressive zeal to improve performance and profit coupled with the pursuit of ever more exacting stretch goals, by any possible means (Head, 2005). To achieve such visions, organizations assemble a talented workforce and charge them to focus relentlessly on efficiency and productivity. The upshot of this are the poor working practices, systematic bullying and toxic working environments frequently found in some high-performance organizations that pride themselves on attracting and rewarding talent (Samnani & Singh, 2014). A specific practice that stands out in such environments is the extent to which organizations use (in)transitive rules to make it difficult for members of their workforce to leave (Goler et al., 2018).

In a similar vein, Agorkoli adopted an iron fist rule to control his people; ordered a state ethic of silence to stifle dissent; and set laborious tasks in pursuit of his ambition. Here, the building of the physical high walls by Agorkoli to prevent his subjects leaving his kingdom is instructive. The Notsie wall in the end left the people feeling imprisoned; they were not free to move around or express themselves, hardening their resolve to search for ways to abscond. In this regard, the very wall that was expected to fortify the kingdom and quash people's desire to depart had the opposite effect; strengthening shared decision-making to take flight. Finally, the fleeing Ewe people walking backwards is emblematic of current practice, in that their footprints confused the King's army of their direction of travel. The puzzling footprints left behind by the fleeing people chime with existing research (e.g., Spain & Groysberg, 2016; Williams et al., 2008), which concludes that dissatisfied employees are likely to provide misleading, unreliable reasons for departure in exit feedback interviews, making it difficult effectively to analyze the root causes of turnover. In the next section, we present an overview of our research process.

Research Process

Research Context

The global financial industry had evolved enormously even before London became the world's second-largest financial center after New York (Sorinel, 2012). One aspect stands out, however: financial products mis-selling has been a standout systemic problem in the UK finance industry (Ashton, 2015; Brannan, 2017). The 1980s and late 1990s saw a steep rise in dysfunctional behavior as exemplified by the mis-selling of financial products including mortgage endowment policies, zero-dividend preference shares, split-capital trusts, precipice bonds, Lehman's structured products and packaged bank accounts (Ferran, 2012; Froud et al., 2017; Sikka, 2009). The mis-selling of personal pensions alone, for example, has prompted the payment of over £10 billion in redress (McConnell and Blacker, 2012; Nobles and Black, 1998). Since 2005, industry regulators, including the UK Financial Services Authority (FSA) and the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS), have been dealing with the fallout from the mis-selling of payment protection insurance (PPI), covering a variety of products and services such as mortgage insurance, secured/unsecured loan insurance, endowment policies, pet insurance and pension protections (Ballantine et al., 2018; BBC, 2013; Ferran, 2012). In an effort to secure redress and restore confidence in the system, regulators imposed fines and penalties on many financial services firms, banks and general insurance firms, and ordered them to pay compensation to customers who purchased PPI between 1990 and 2010, before the deadline of August 19th, 2019 (Halan et al., 2014; Hosking & Martin, 2019).

Implementing regulatory changes has required an immense amount of FCH manpower. For example, the Lloyds Group alone employed 7 000 FCHs to handle its PPI complaints, with an estimated compensation of £3.8–£5bn received by claims management companies between April 2011 and November 2015 (Economist, 2019; National Audit Office, 2016). Some firms involved in the scandal had to outsource "cleaning up activities" to external third-party claims management firms, who employed a veritable army of FCHs to handle customer complaints and redressing activities. The FCHs are responsible for investigating, resolving, and responding to complaints, which could entail financial, regulatory, or reputational implications for the business. Operating at the "coalface" of managing customer complaints, FCHs handle and resolve FCA reportable complaints within regulatory guidelines and in line with respective authority levels. Akin to many jobs in financial services that provide good benefits and meaningful work, the salary, bonus, and pension scheme for FCHs remain competitive, but the huge backlog of PPI complaints means that this unit of employees operate under enormous, sustained pressure to meet their targets (Jones, 2018; Salmon & Joseph, 2018). While the average turnover rates in financial services generally fall far below other sectors such as retail or hospitality, existing evidence suggests that many FCHs are overworked, receive inadequate on the job training, and form a group of employees in the UK finance industry which exhibits a particularly high turnover (FSA, 2010; Robins, 2018), hence the present inquiry. We present our methodology in what follows.

Research Methodology

Owing to the paucity of research on turnover among FCHs, we adopted a qualitative exploratory research approach for our study (Stebbins, 2001). As our chosen theoretical lens is informed by a literary folklore, we followed a qualitative research methodology which allowed research participants to make sense of their stories and narrate their accounts of their work experiences in their own terms (Harvey et al., 2020; Maclean et al., 2012; Schubring et al., 2019; Tracy, 2019). We developed three theoretical sampling criteria to select research participants for the study. First, participants must have worked as FCHs in the financial sector for a minimum of three years within the Greater London area, London being a vital global financial capital. Second, they should have worked in a similar role for more than one firm within this period. Third, they should have moved from one organization to another in this role without completing the contracted time for which they were recruited. A snowballing technique was employed to reach and recruit potential research participants (Edmonds, 2019). An acquaintance of one of the researchers who met our sampling criteria provided our initial interview. The acquaintance then referred us to three of her former colleagues. This referral-snowballing process continued until the stories we heard in the field became saturated. After agreeing to participate in the study, respondents confirmed a convenient day, time, and place of their choosing for face-to-face interviews. In all, 20 individuals who met our sampling criteria participated in the study. A summary of the socio-demographic particulars of participants is presented in Table 2.

Our research participants were predominantly female (n = 13). Aged between 22 and 50, their average age was 34 years 1 month, with 70% (14) educated up to first-degree level. Fifteen participants worked in retail banking, three in general insurance, and a further two in the broader financial services area. Together, they reported an average of 4 years 2 months working as FCHs.

Data for the inquiry was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing respondents to share their retrospective accounts of their experiences working as FCHs in an "unexpurgated fashion" (Choak, 2012; Hollinshead & Maclean, 2007). All interviews were carried out in private, at a location convenient to the interviewee. Lasting

Table 2. Summary of interviewee socio-demographic information.

#	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Qualification	Area of business	Years*	Current job title
1	Abigail	Female	31	Master	Financial services	3	Business Analyst
2	Barbara	Female	38	Master	Retail banking	4	Project Manager
3	Mary	Female	36	Master	General insurance	4	Research Student
4	Derrick	Male	33	Master	Retail banking	3	Business Analyst
5	Anthony	Male	40	Master	Retail banking	5	Business Analyst
6	Jessica	Female	30	Bachelor	Retail banking	2	Quality Controller
7	Rosaline	Female	34	Bachelor	General insurance	4	Project Manager
8	Bartosz	Male	32	Bachelor	Retail banking	3	Clerical Staff
9	Ahmed	Male	26	Bachelor	Retail banking	3	Recruitment Specialist
10	Nadeem	Male	45	Diploma	Financial services	6	Compliance Officer
11	Hikmah	Female	29	Diploma	Retail banking	4	Mortgage Advisor
12	Caroline	Female	27	Bachelor	Retail banking	5	Customer Services
13	Angelina	Female	50	A Levels	General insurance	6	Admin Officer
14	Nadia	Female	29	Diploma	Retail banking	5	Team Manager
15	Ayesha	Female	35	Master	Retail banking	2	Project Support
16	Femi	Male	33	Bachelor	Retail banking	4	IT Specialist
17	Charlotte	Female	22	Bachelor	Retail banking	5	Nurse
18	David	Male	49	A Levels	Retail banking	8	Supply Chain Officer
19	Ambika	Female	34	A Levels	Retail banking	3	Logistics Officer
20	Tammy	Female	28	A Levels	Retail banking	4	Project Support Officer

*Number of years respondent worked as FCH.

approximately 90 min in duration, each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim within 24 h. Interviews began with an assurance of confidentiality, deemed especially important given the misleading information often provided at exit interviews alluded to above, followed by the collection of the interviewee's relevant socio-demographic data. Next, participants were invited to provide a retrospective account of how they became FCHs and to narrate their lived experiences working in this role. We then narrowed down our questioning to probe how it was that they reached the decision to quit, the manner of their departure, and to elicit their personal reflections on the way work is organized within the broader finance industry such as they experienced it.

Taking narratives as storied accounts of people's experiences, we adopted the five key steps in narrative inquiry advanced by Riessman (2008) – attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing, and reading – for our data analysis. As turnover is a complex phenomenon, we followed Bloom et al. (2020) in integrating some grounded theory analytic processes and techniques with our narrative analysis to improve our interpretive scope and theorizing efforts. As we explain below, we employed techniques such as iteration, the development of first and second order codes, and the writing of brief analytic narratives to develop our findings, and explanatory theory (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Attending

Here we set out to familiarize ourselves with the broader experiences of our research participants, "getting to know" and "getting a feel" for the context within which they operated as FCHs. This involved studying a variety of archival FCH job advertisements, perusing industry regulators publications on FCH roles, and newspaper reports on the sheer number of FCHs employed by the UK finance industry. This gave us the opportunity to empathetically learn more about the career experiences of our research participants, the role of FCHs in the finance industry, and thereby to reconcile what our participants said they did as FCHs with the work of a typical FCH. This enabled us to glean rich, nuanced, contextualized insights into the broader FCH turnover phenomenon in the UK financial sector (Morgan & Sturdy, 2000).

Telling

Our analysis then moved into gathering stories about the lived FCH career experiences of our research participants and the contexts in which they worked. In this regard, the audio-tapes from the interviews were carefully listened to several times to ensure they reflected what we had heard in the field so we could make meaningful judgements of the storied accounts of our respondents, their relevance, and implicit connections (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Here, cross-references were made between the transcribed data and mental and field notes, which allowed for adjustments where necessary. Our initial textual analysis focused on our respondents' work as FCHs, "what" triggered their exit, and "how" they left their organizations, which served as our basic social processes (BSP) (Glaser, 1996). Producing a plethora of segments that were further categorized according to their similarities and analytical connections, recurrent phrases were also identified and "analytically converted" (Strauss, 1978, 30) to fit our BSP categories.

Transcribing and Analyzing

Narrative analysis as an interpretative activity elicits meaningful connections between experiences, thus rendering them intelligible. To achieve this, we iteratively cycled between the data and extant turnover literature, looking for patterns of systematic references to turnover in organizing as a guide to identifying a broad range of relevant themes. The identified themes were then analyzed and interpreted iteratively until some common themes emerged and became saturated (Suddaby, 2006). We then sorted, reconstituted, and indexed the themes to generate the analytical categories (Myers, 2019) of the four Agorkorlian tyrannical ethics we developed in Table 1. Probing further the connections and conceptual properties of the respective categories, we searched for meaningful connections between the Notsie exodus and our participants' experiences to explore viable theoretical explanations of the stories we heard in the field – namely: the eye of providence, relentless pursuit of excellence, infantilization at work, and marginalization at work.

Reading

This final stage of our analysis involved creating meanings out of the narratives we heard in ways that invite further inquiry to foster a deeper understanding of turnover, as opposed to merely reflecting on it. Here, we applied our indexed categories to the entire dataset. We then continued with our iterative comparison of the themes in the recurrent stories with the extant turnover literature, re-connecting our Notsie narrative to participants' storied accounts to build fresh understanding of how FCHs make sense of turnover in practice.

Before presenting the fine details of our research findings, it is appropriate to reflect on our methodological limitations. First, in relying on referrals and snowballing to reach participants, we may have referred to "networks of likeminded individuals and failed to capture differing perspectives of other people" who formerly worked as FCHs (Lashley & Pollock, 2019, p. 39). Second, since we invited respondents to provide retrospective accounts of their FCH experience, we cannot rule out the potential impact or consequences of self-serving bias, exaggeration, or embellishment in the stories we heard in the field (Carson, 2019). Finally, while our study focuses on the behaviors and perception of FCHs, we cannot account for the dynamics among FCHs as a specific work unit, nor the workplace dynamics of the organizations in which they worked, and how these may have influenced their socialization and views of how work was organized and performed. In the next section, we present the details of our research findings.

Operating Inside Notsie Kingdom

Our findings indicate that the global discourse on efficiency and productivity (Ivanova & von Scheve, 2020) has proven to be a powerful force driving the highly competitive UK finance industry. As a corollary of this, our data evidence suggests that high performance working regimes have been adopted by many firms operating in the financial sector as an efficient response to rising operational cost and perceived increases in competitive pressures (Russell et al., 2018; Selden & Sowa, 2015). Relentless pursuit of efficiency and productivity gains by managers in the high-pressure environment in which they operate has encouraged the adoption and implementation of impulsive organizing practices that prioritize results and profits over employee wellbeing. Such practices appear "Darwinian" in orientation, promoting the "survival of the fittest", while rewarding (despotic) managerial actions and decisions. Table 3 provides an overview of illustrative quotes derived from our interviews that reflect the character of the regimes in which our research participants worked, their stream of interactions, flow of their situated initiatives and relations, and the managerial practices and tactics. This resonates with and provides a richer picture of some of the salient happenings in Notsie in the seventeenth century.

Emphasizing how such managerial practices may cumulatively combine to precipitate turnover, we now delineate the fine details of our findings according to four aggregate themes we unpacked from the storied accounts of FCHs: the eye of providence, relentless pursuit of excellence, infantilization at work, and marginalization at work.

The Eye of Providence

The people of Notsie by all accounts were under what we might call the "big brother" gaze of their King. Thus, the eye of providence as used in organizing our findings refers to "the all-seeing eyes" of the King and his security apparatus which made it impossible for the people of Notsie to hide or leave the kingdom. The accounts of our FCHs suggest that they operated under a ubiquitous system of intensive surveillance, employed by organizations to monitor, track, and control the activities of employees (Bain & Taylor, 2000). This draws on Foucault's (1980, p. 161) exploration of "the penetrative power of the gaze" which operates in circuits of productive labor. Foucault (1980, p. 155) explains this as follows:

> There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its own weight will end by interiorization to the

Table 3. Illustrative quotes on impulsive managerial practices that precipitate turnover.

Category	Exemplar quotes from storied accounts
The eye of providence	"I was not allowed to have my phone on my desk while at work, it had to be locked up in a locker." (Abigail, 31)
	"My manager and senior management kept track of the times I clocked into the office and clocked out every day and made references to timing discrepancies of less than 5 min." (Mary, 36)
	"Every activity carried out on our computers was constantly being monitored remotely." (Tammy, 28)
Relentless pursuit of excellence	"I struggled to achieve my weekly targets because the yardstick for measurement was unrealistic." (Caroline, 27)
	"Negative feedbacks resulting from poor ratings on a case quality checked for me meant I stood a higher risk of losing my job." (Nadia, 29)
	"The targets kept on getting increased each time the management realized that majority of the FCH had found a balance on how to achieve their weekly targets adequately." (Charlotte, 22)
Infantilization at work	"My creativity could not be put to good use as I always had to follow the script, even when it did not quite fit the situation." (Barbara, 38)
	"We were called into a meeting and told there would be a £5 reduction in our daily wages. No explanation or consultation was done, and I could not shake off the feeling of being under-valued." (Derrick, 33)
	"There was a one-month notice period demanded before I could quit, or else a month's wage would be withheld." (Nadeem, 45)
Marginalization at work	"Permanent staff were treated in a more dignified manner while we contract staff had our needs disregarded. We had no fridge in our workstations while the permanent staff did." (Hikmah, 29)
	"We could not be seen with our phones during office hours, yet our managers always had theirs in full view and used it for personal purposes during work hours." (Ambika, 34)
	"The permanent staff had more support (training and coaching) on the job if needed to improve the standard of their work while we were mostly placed on performance plans which could result in dismissal." (Rosaline, 34)

> point that he [*sic*] is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself.

The "big brother" gaze, as narrated by our participants, played out in the form of a combination of strategically placed CCTV cameras, security devices on doors, swipe cards to gain access to workstations, and the monitoring of clocking-on and clocking-off times to measure and record time spent in the workplace. The tensions sparked amongst many of our participants by the coercive effects of these invasive technologies and the corresponding infringement of their sense of privacy, we found, drove many to identify them as primary reasons why they moved on. The excessive, constant gaze of these tracking technologies, they maintained, made them wary of every action they took at work. Such systems allowed managers to achieve what Lyon (2001:, p. 175) refers to as "compliance through fear". As Ayesha and Derrick explain:

> "I once stepped away from my desk to stretch my legs and chat. After a few minutes, my line manager walked over and said, 'You have been chatting with Dave for 5 min, return to your desk and get on with your work, please!'" (Ayesha, 35).

> "My manager called me on a Monday morning saying he could not approve my timesheet for the previous week because I had filled in 8:00 am start time on my tracker. But the spread sheet report he pulled up shows I had not logged on to my computer until 08:15 am." (Derrick, 33)

The rebuke Ayesha receives for chatting with a co-worker recalls the edict of silence imposed by King Agorkoli as a means of stifling dissent, accompanied by punishments for transgressors. Both Ayesha and Derrick assert that organizational stretch objectives made the surveillance systems to which they were subjected more invidious. In particular, the systems were frequently programmed by managers in ways that implicitly questioned employees' judgements. The upshot, they related, was "the need for even more monitoring – a catch 22" (Bupp, 2001, p. 79). Such management control strategies recall the placing of spies among the Notsie people by King Agorkoli to monitor their movements. The story Angelina recounts below brings into sharp focus how these tracking technologies can be deployed as an instrument of managerial control, coercion, and employee subordination. Angelina's account of a supportive supervisor nevertheless shows how such strategies might be used alternatively in a more positive fashion, recalling the wise counsel of Tegli from whom the Ewe people sought guidance, who ultimately provided them with an exit route:

> "My first manager was supportive. She often checked on the systems to see how far along we were in the review of our cases. She would then use the knowledge she gained from monitoring us via the system to allocate the next batch of cases. She would give whosoever was struggling a more straightforward case, so they would not have two complex cases in a row." (Angelina, 50)

Angelina nevertheless determined to quit her job after a team reshuffle, when a new manager used the information obtained from the tracking systems to dominate and instil fear in team members. She clarifies:

> "We were pushed to do things in specific ways since we were under constant watch. The salary was good, but the pressure you have to endure to work in that environment was unbearable. I simply decided to walk away, and I understand more than half of the team members also left." (Angelina, 50)

Angelina explained that her new manager adopted strict surveillance practices in order to perfect managerial control. While this may potentially maximize employees' effort, it may, as in Angelina's case, precipitate feelings of stress, anxiety, and performance fatigue (Abraham et al., 2019; Manley et al., 2022), which in turn encouraged her to leave, and perhaps other team members to follow her example. The *"big brother" gaze* explored here is thus evocative of watchtowers, suggestive of the high walls imposed by King Agorkoli. The walls, for FCHs, may have been intangible, but were experienced as substantive and material, nonetheless.

Relentless Pursuit of Excellence

Beyond the building of the enduring city wall around Notsie which prevented the people of Notsie from escaping, the relentless pursuit of details and excellence was a hallmark of the King of Notsie. Relentlessly pursuing detail, excellence and sometimes, the impossible, the King is reported to have frequently over-worked his people, made them do laborious work, and set them difficult tasks and unachievable targets and stretch goals (Dotse, 2011). In the case of our FCHs, these played out in the form of what we describe as "relentless evaluation" to capture the intense collection, quantification, and analyses of human performance in organizing (Mannon, 2018). The inexorable pursuit of efficiency and productivity, according to participants, manifested itself in managerial devotion to and obsession with pseudo-scientific performance metrics and arbitrary comparative evaluations, mirroring the laborious tasks set by King Agorkoli to achieve his goals. We heard numerous stories about how unrelenting evaluations culminated in unrealistic performance targets being set for FCHs, which sometimes required them to expend very long hours each day striving to attain them, reminiscent of the impossible tasks set by King Agorkoli. Failure to achieve such targets meant foregoing pay rises and promotion opportunities:

> "Failure to achieve your weekly target means you would not be paid in full for that week. You definitely had to put in additional unpaid hours to make it. The pressures on the job were nerve-racking and not for the faint-hearted." (Rosaline, 34)

Our participants also recounted their concerns occasioned by spurious FCH ratings criteria, which they argue were marred by inconsistencies, reflecting deeply entrenched biases, and influencing their turnover intentions. Nadia for example, observed that petty "office politics" frequently metamorphosed into biases in employee ratings conducted by managers. Here, we follow Mau (2019) in observing that in such environments where quantification prevails, power and privilege accrue to those keeping the score (Stringfellow et al., 2014). Thus, Nadia explains how FCHs who were on friendly terms with line-managers were favored and often given the chance to correct errors on completed work before a quality check was carried out. They might even be graded a pass, she claims, while similar mistakes regularly resulted in a failure for other FCHs. In a related development, Mary remarked that 10% of reviewed cases were automatically subjected to quality checks (instead of being randomly selected), but that some managers cherry-picked cases for sampling, resulting in fear, biased reviews in favor of friends, and a higher probability of a failed case for others. Mary recounts how this impacted on her view of the organization and corresponding decision to quit:

> "Each email I got with the subject "quality check" raised my heartbeat. Getting a fail meant being embarrassed in front of the whole team, as my manager would announce the grade across the room without any consideration for how this made us feel. Getting a fail also heightened the scrutiny approach of my line manager." (Mary, 36)

In this storied account, Mary explains how "quality checks" were used to discipline operatives perceived by supervisors, rightly or wrongly, as poorly performing, their alleged failures being broadcast to co-workers. Another respondent who corroborated Mary's story reported that the marking scheme for the quality check criterion did not consider the previous "good works" of the employee in question. It was reportedly so strict that an FCH who failed three cases would be required to leave the project. Such intransigence on the part of managers, Ciocchetti (2011) insists, often precipitates feelings of unfairness and unjustifiable prejudice against employees and, as Mary recounted, prompted her decision to quit. *Relentless evaluation*, as exemplified by regular "quality checks" on the performance of FCHs, resonates with the use of penalties meted out arbitrarily to would-be opponents by King Agorkorli.

Infantilization at Work

Situated and endemic to the rule of the King of Notsie was the prolonged domination and maltreatment of his people, who were denied meaningful agency. We account for this emergent practice-relational behavior in the social dominance orientation of middlelevel managers, as played out in the way they actively suppress the autonomy available for FCHs to set their own schedule and organize their work, as infantilization at work. Our data suggest that some managers, fuelled by an impulse to drive productivity, found it difficult to take risk or treat subordinates as responsible adults when crafting their work (Furedi, 2005; Vardaman et al., 2008). The upshot is employees reporting they felt being treated as less than they are, with their freedom to executing duties getting curtailed. Anthony relates how he was forced to reconsider his job because was given little room to set his own work schedule and prioritize his work obligations:

> "I left the job mainly because my line manager frustrated me out of it. She required us to seek approval on everything we did, and she questioned every decision we took on our allocated cases, even though we followed the procedure guide to review the work done." (Anthony, 40)

The insidious lack of what Anthony described as "basic decision" authority and decision latitude meant micromanaging managers did not allow him and his FCH colleagues to have a "real say" in their own working conditions. Nadeem likewise claims his aversion for prescribed solutions prevented him from experiencing the job satisfaction he had hoped to gain from working in the high-profile organization he joined as FCH:

> "I pride myself in being a resourceful and creative person. However, my team leader and I frequently disagreed on the work philosophies as he did not like me questioning his actions, so he started picking on me at every opportunity. I got allocated the worst cases in our database. I was expected to take instructions and not question decisions." (Nadeem, 45)

Both respondents asserted that they were accorded very little room for manoeuvre to apply their "metistic knowledge" and their situated practical skills and intelligence (Sarpong et al., 2018) to manage their caseloads. On the contrary, they felt their individual worth, abilities and expertise were undermined by managers reluctant to place trust in subordinates. Both determined to move on because their professional experience was negated, they claimed, by an overly restrictive work environment that left them feeling stressed, uneasy, and unable to perform their best work (Heavey et al., 2013). Here, we deduce that although it would be ideal to let employees be more "creative" in their work, lack of accountability, integral to the systemic problems in the UK financial sector, has swung the pendulum far in the other direction for financial services organizations and their managers in terms of oversight and scrutiny. For Barbara, managerial infantilization in her workplace bordered on micro-aggression that made her feel she could never exercise control over her career progression in the organization. However, she felt unable simply to walk out, as others did, because she needed the experience.

> "For a long time, I refused to seek employment elsewhere, mainly because this was a high-profile bank, so each time I thought about the poor organizing practices and lack of development opportunities, I reminded myself of how good working in this bank looked on my CV and the advantages of working close to home." (Barbara, 38)

This need for experience thus serves to hold FCHs "captive", inhibiting their impulse to move on, and functioning in this way as a metaphorical "wall". A reluctant "remainer" whose mobility was constrained by normative influences and benefits that would be foregone upon exit (Hom et al., 2012), Barbara recounts how she endured acute job insecurity for another two years before eventually summoning the courage to move on. *Infantilization at work* articulates with the lack of discretion shown by King Agorkoli to his people, kept in the role of children, until they finally summoned the courage to escape.

Marginalization at Work

Historical accounts of the subjugation of polyphonic voices in Notsie has been legendary. For many historians, King Agorkoli nurtured a "culture of silence" which trapped and marginalized his subjects (e.g., Amenumey, 1986; Quarcoopome, 1993). Grounded in discursive practices, we capture the upshot of this marginalization in the way our FCH felt they were denied esteem and a "voice" in their everyday situated practice in a compliance driven environment. The starting point, we surmise, is the established criteria of social belonging which determine the basic working contracts afforded to individual FCHs. Our participants argue that the "small print" in their contracts, which were never discussed during hiring, contained numerous hidden clauses that tied them to the job. In particular, those who joined their organizations as contract staff stressed how managers employed arm-twisting tactics to encourage them to sign unfair contracts. These subsequently triggered their desire to leave because, with hindsight, they came to feel their expertise was not valued in the organization. In the following extract, Charlotte recounts the perceived unfairness of her contract:

> "I was expected to give a full month's notice if I intended to leave the organization. However, the company reserved the right to terminate my work contract without serving any notice." (Charlotte, 22)

In many instances, participants maintained that leaving the job within the initial six weeks of joining meant they would not be paid for the period they worked. Femi articulates his dismay at the differences in the actual or perceived functional value of the work of an FCH as experienced by permanent staff and those on temporary contracts:

> "It was shocking for me to see the glaring differences in the way the permanent staff of the bank were treated in contrast to the contract staff. We were all recruited to do the same job, but they had more benefits and amenities at their disposal than we did." (Femi, 33)

Nadia echoes the frustration experienced as a contract employee with a bank:

> "I struggled to find a seat daily because the section provided for contract staff was designated as hot-desking, and there were not enough desks for all. Permanent staff had allocated desks and could come into work at their convenience, but we had to keep scrambling for seats." (Nadia, 29)

Threatened with foregoing pay rises or contract extensions if they did not meet their targets, both Femi and Nadia claimed they were denied the resources they needed to interact with others as peers, perform better, and participate fully in organizational life, which left them feeling marginalized. Participants agreed that high achievers who hit their targets received the best performance reviews on the team, enjoying preferential treatment. As Bartosz elaborates:

> "I expected my manager to understand that some people are naturally more inclined to work at a faster pace than others, but as long as the rest of us still get the job done within the timescale, we should not be treated differently." (Bartosz, 32)

Bartosz affirms that he completely lost faith in the organization, as he formed the view that he and many others were continually being set up for failure, required to deliver the impossible, in the manner of King Agorkoli who devised unattainable tasks for his subjects. The system which, Bartosz claimed, set quasi-criteria for social belonging, left many feeling marginalized and excluded, in turn propelling staff to leave their posts. *Marginalization-in-practice* thus chimes with the story of the Ewe people, treated with respect by the former kings of Notsie who resolved conflict fairly, yet whose treatment and status diminished under Agorkoli.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we explore the incidence of high turnover among FCHs as a group of employees operating in the high-pressure UK finance industry. Earlier we inquired how is it that high-performing organizations experience such high turnover. While prior research has emphasized how people quit, underscoring a broad range of antecedents, we advance a *Notsie* narrative perspective deriving from West African literary folklore as an interpretive lens to extend our understanding on turnover in contemporary organizing. In doing so, we explicate how context, characterized by an unrelenting, industry-wide pursuit of unit-level efficiency and productivity stretch goals fuelled by a neo-liberal orthodoxy, culminates in what we term *managerial tyranny*. This entails a set of impulsive and oppressive managerial practices which play out as the eye of providence, relentless pursuit of excellence, infantilization at work, and marginalization at work, that operate together or serially to precipitate high turnover in such work units.

One question which arises is, why is it that the financial services industry is marked by such high employee turnover? In answer, we suggest that managerial practices which have become more frequent in contemporary organizations are magnified and amplified in such high-performing, high-pressure workplaces. The finance industry serves as a microcosm for broader managerial practices that are becoming more commonplace and institutionalized in wider society (Brougham & Haar, 2018; Wang et al., 2018). The fast-moving, frenetic pace of financial services environments exacerbates tendencies which are themselves becoming more apparent and accentuated in modern living. The need to *deliver the impossible* highlighted by Bartosz is indicative of a deep-seated motivation which propels society-at-large, emblematic of the growing *intensity* of modern life as depicted by Deleuze (2004). Here, “confronted with the most mechanical, the most stereotypical repetitions … we endlessly extract from them little differences, variations, and modifications” (Deleuze, 2004, viii). Deleuze explains that faced with incessant repetition, individuals find interest and satisfaction in the small differences they enact. The endless repetition and intensification of work tasks accompanied by close surveillance that we illustrate here, however, stifles individual initiative, giving rise to organizations that prevent employees from implementing small variations of their own accord. Such working environments leave little scope for creative job crafting or individuation, from which individuals might derive meaning. Organizations that function in this way, animated by a market value regime, thus come to treat employees as essentially interchangeable – hence disposable and ultimately, throwaway.

In this regard, the context-emergent turnover theory we develop provides a holistic but parsimonious understanding of how turnover plays out as a driver of human capital depletion (Nyberg & Ployhart, 2013; Reilly, Nyberg, Maltarich, & Weller, 2014). The ruses adopted by the Notsie narrative recounted above mirror contemporary organizational life. They recall the dynamic influence of "tyrannical" managerial practices on turnover. The wall Agorkoli constructed around his kingdom, intended to help him exercise tight control and prevent people fleeing his oppressive rule, is reflected in the organizational manipulation of employees through the use of electronic and other surveillance techniques. While it may seem fanciful to draw a comparison between Agorkoli's wall and contemporary managerial practices, the Berlin Wall, designed to prevent the East German people from relocating westwards, provides a pertinent and chilling modern parallel of an attempt to control, contain, and perpetually monitor a population through the erection of a wall and watchtowers (Maclean et al., 2017). More bizarrely, students at the University of Manchester found themselves caged in behind prison-like fences during lockdown in November 2020, sparking student protests. Like the Notsie citizens seeking a way out, individuals caught in such organizing architectures likely search for opportunities to depart and find careers that better suit their talents and aspirations. Agorkoli's imposing impossible tasks on his subjects evokes the ever more demanding stretch goals prescribed for employees, and how work is reduced to tick boxes in the name of efficiency and productivity. Even the Notsie escapees' walking backwards, their footprints fooling pursuers of their direction of flight, resonates with the notion that employees knowingly provide misleading responses to exit questionnaires to obscure the real reasons for their departure.

As an industry that prides itself in attracting and retaining talent, UK finance firms that employ FCHs both pay well and regularly provide numerous perks, including concierge services, discounted gift cards, gym discounts and travel savings. Such corporate largesse may play a role in setting managers' expectations that FCHs will automatically buy into their high-performance work regimes and repertoires, even if they appear antithetical to their aspirations. Yet the very nature of the role performed by FCHs provides them with invaluable opportunities to jump ship. As one participant observed, "having one of the 'big banks' on my résumé was like having gold dust sprinkled on my work history". The experience and competence of FCHs marks them out as desirable in the eyes of other employers, who appear equally happy to offer a premium salary and a reason to move on.

Our study and its findings have implications for theory. We contribute to research on turnover by highlighting the effects and (un)intended consequences of managerial practices such as they impact on turnover. Our research thus brings agency, relationality, and shared decision-making back into theorizing employees' departures within groups, work units, organizations, or entire industries. We propose that the managerial practices identified above have become relatively commonplace in contemporary organizations. The finance industry thus serves as a microcosm for the managerial tyranny and work intensification emblematic of and endemic in wider society, informed by market values and a neo-liberal ethos. The marketization of numerous aspects of contemporary life is accompanied by an increasing prevalence of surveillance through artificial intelligence, the preserve not just of a growing number of organizations but increasingly of entire nations.

More importantly, we contribute a novel perspective drawn from the Global South – the simple but resonant Notsie narrative, percolating through time and space – as a reflection on contemporary organizational life, propelled by a continuous obsession with and discourse on efficiency and productivity (Ivanova & von Scheve, 2020). This contributes to an endless and ever more intensive repetition of tasks, limiting scope for variation, creativity, and individual initiative (Deleuze, 2004). Our Notsie narrative points to overlooked potentialities and alternative "ways of knowing" that might inform the present, highlighting temporal-historical connections which illuminate contemporary organizational life (Beigi, Callahan, & Michaelson, 2019; Gabriel, 2000; Pio & Syed, 2020). Relationality comes to the fore since both supervisors and supervised are implicated. The thoughtful supervisor alluded to by Angelina shows how relations can be more positive when concerned with both parties. Irrespective of the failings of the work units and organizations explored here, individual FCHs displayed an alacrity to move on to the next organization, seemingly unable to "dig in" for the long haul, suggesting that such jobs are provisional and symptomatic of the transitory nature of contemporary organizational life. A Notsie narrative perspective shows unequivocally that prosperity is fundamentally shared, indivisible from the collectivity with whose fate it is bound up, not the product of unilateral individual ambition, and that this relationality is key to its enduring success. The wisdom of our Notsie narrative perspective thus centers on the importance and preservation of the collectivity and of the common good, the centuries old Notsie kingdom being doomed to collapse without its people; a wisdom seemingly unavailable to the Global North, whose "truths" lie conversely in the pursuit of individualism, rationality, and short termism.

The primary managerial implications we draw from our work are twofold. First, our argument throughout this paper has highlighted the value in revisiting literary folklores to reveal their previously overlooked connections to contemporary human resource management. Illuminating how the intersection of social construction and human agency may play out in organizing in the high-powered finance industry, our study directs managerial attention to how some ostensibly standard organizing practices designed to enhance efficiency may prove counter-productive in specific work units. Since these organizing practices and routines are influenced by managers and employees alike (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011), our findings uncover essential dynamics and potential trial-and-error tweaks that could be made to relational practices, providing opportunities for managers to enhance their learning, and become more reflexive in dealing with employee churn. Second, our findings emphasize the need for HR managers, especially those operating within high performance systems, to reconsider how they promote productivity, so that moral integrity is not sacrificed on the altar of efficiency. HR managers need to be cognizant that the use of performance ratings informed by pseudo-scientific criteria cannot trump employee subjectivity which, given perceptions of victimization, may seek out forms of resistance. We have highlighted aspects of managerial practices that may be construed as detrimental to employees' need to exercise creativity and initiative at work, and how potentially intrusive forms of digital monitoring and surveillance can reinforce their sense of coercion in the workplace (Sewell & Barker, 2006). An emphasis on effective ways of managing founded on shared values, mutual respect and demonstrable fairness could lead to improved practices that might stem the tide of turnover in many work units.

Our study naturally has limitations which, in turn, provide opportunities for future research. While our data suggest that the careers and experiences of research participants in the UK finance industry may resemble those of other job sectors within and outside the UK, given the distinctiveness of the sub-group under scrutiny, care should be taken in generalizing these findings beyond the finance industry. This, we have suggested, forms a microcosm, a high-powered, frenetic environment where the practices outlined above may be particularly exacerbated. Second, our chosen theoretical lens may have hampered our potential to take account of alternative explanations for turnover among the FCHs we studied. Our Notsie narrative perspective suggests they were over-monitored and evaluated, micromanaged and marginalized. At the same time, these are not great jobs in terms of the work itself – boring, repetitive, and perhaps not very intrinsically motivating. Many of our participants, moreover, were contractors rather than permanent employees. Is it working as a contractor that is quite unsatisfying? In this regard, we invite scholars to replicate this study to identify other potential causes of high turnover among FCHs. Third, literary folklores are popularly regarded as indicative of acknowledged truths, but they are also known to blend fact and fiction (Gabriel, 2000). In this regard, while our Notsie narrative provides moral lessons that expand understanding of turnover, the disparate, archaic nature of this West African literary folklore may obscure as much as it illuminates. Exploration of contemporary organizing through the lens of literary folklore, we propose, can nevertheless add valuable insights in ways that may refine our understanding of present-day organizational life, with the corresponding potential to shape future research.

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